



Wallowa County Chieftain/File
Joe Town, left, stands with Wallowa Senior Center cook Tammy Odegaard in 2015. Town, who was a member of the Wallowa Senior Center Advisory Board, was instrumental in getting the center built.

LASTING LEGACY

Longtime city councilor Joe Town has spent half his life in Wallowa

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — Joe Town has spent most of his 90 years in Wallowa, and most of those years serving the city in one fashion or another.

He recently retired as a longtime city councilor and, most recently, as city council president.

He said the stroke he had in April is causing him troubles.

“I’m not doing too bad for an old man,” he said, but “it’s limiting my total abilities.”

Born in North Dakota, Town served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He was an electronics technician aboard a destroyer, but didn’t get close to Korea.

“I spent most of my time in the Mediterranean monitoring Russian radar,” he said.

He and his wife, Maxine, both were teachers. They moved here from Alaska in 1975. She taught first and second grades for 20 years at Wallowa Elementary School, while he taught all math, physics and chemistry at Imbler High School, some 34 miles away.

Those may have been tough subjects for many, but Town was pleased with his students.

“You’ve got good kids to work with,” he recalls.

The Towns had two children. A daughter now lives in Hawaii with their two granddaughters. A son died of cerebral palsy in his 40s, Town said.

The couple retired in the mid-1990s and decided to stay in their home.

“I built an A-frame house here,” he said. “We decided to not move after we retired and just stay here.”

Town began his service to the city with his first term on the council in 1977.

“I got involved and chaired a lot of senior center projects for many years,” he said.

His first stint in office lasted until 1985. He returned seven years ago.



Trace Collier/Contributed Photo
Longtime Wallowa City Councilman Joe Town, seated, receives a plaque in appreciation of his decades of service to the city alongside Mayor Gary Hulse in the council chambers at Wallowa City Hall during the council’s meeting on Dec. 21, 2021.

Between that time, he continued working on the city’s budget committee.

“The most important thing was starting the Wallowa Senior Center Endowment Fund with the Oregon Community Foundation,” Town said. “It has grown to over \$140,000 and returns about \$6,000 a year for operation of the center.”

Helping start the entree program to support nutritious meals countywide was another long-range endeavor, he said.

Although he’s never served as mayor, being council president is the same thing when the mayor is unavailable.

City Recorder Carolyn Harshfield said Town will be hard to replace.

“The city is truly going to miss him,” she said in an email. “He used to be a math teacher and was amazing helping with the city budget.”

Mayor Gary Hulse agreed.

“He has been a super big help with the city of Wallowa,” Hulse said. “He’s volunteered with many things.”

At the council’s meeting on Dec. 21, 2021 — which also happened to be Town’s 90th birthday — the councilors presented him with a cake and a plaque honoring his service to Wallowa.

“That was my birthday.

They said you have to come to the council meeting,” Town said. “We just talked a bit about some of the things that have happened since I’ve been here.”

During that time, they recalled that the city hall was moved to its current location from its former site across from the post office, the Wallowa Senior Center was built in 1995, the new fire hall was put in after 9/11 and Kevin’s Tire Shop that was faced with being forced to close down at its old location moved to a building that he now leases from the city on the truck route.

“We saved those jobs,” Town said of the tire shop move.

Hulse and others will truly miss working with Town.

“He’s been super good to work with,” the mayor said. “He’s a great guy and will be greatly missed on helping out with the city council.”

But for Town, it’s been enough.

“It’s 45 years,” he said.

VOICES

First rule of public speaking: Understand your audience

By **CAROLEE KOLVE**
Special to The Observer

In my junior year in high school, my mother fashioned herself as my college admissions coach. She decreed that I needed something besides grades and SAT scores. I needed to become a school leader. “No athletic skill, no musical talent, only mundane summer jobs,” she told me, shaking her head sadly.

“But no track record for leadership either,” I said.

To make it more improbable, I had just switched from a small girls’ school to a large public school. Not only did I know no one, but I regularly came home from school in tears because I had eaten lunch by myself. How was I to transition from pathetic loner to school leader?

It was my junior year, and I took a stab. I ran for the lowest possible office: student body secretary. And lost. My entire campaign consisted of two posters. If anyone even saw them, they were certainly not persuaded to “Take a chance with Carolee Nance.” A slogan that was neither aspirational nor inspirational, although it did rhyme.

But my senior year, there was another election. This time my mother said, “This is your last hope, so you have to run for something which involves giving a speech.”

My mother assured me she knew everything there was to know about speech-making as she had just purchased “The Art of Public Speaking” by Dale Carnegie. Of course, she hadn’t read it yet.

I figured out that I needed some ideas, so I polled the girls I had gotten to know. Between us, we determined that a body of several hundred young women could probably do some significant things, and so far they were just an idle clump of girls. I asked everyone, “What would you enjoy doing?” I heard ideas about school dances, good deeds in the community, ways to raise money.

I tested ideas on other girls. People nodded and smiled. My confidence was nudging up.

And then I learned about my competition.

I only had one opponent. She was the most popular girl in the school. She was in an elite club of other popular girls, who were all promoting her campaign. The week after the upcoming election was a school dance, and somehow everyone knew she would be attending with the handsome football and baseball star who was about to be elected Student Body President. Clearly, they were the “star couple.”

Undaunted, my mother began my speech coaching, paraphrasing loosely from Dale Carnegie, or at least from the table of contents. There were some rules, but mostly it seemed to be common sense.

I had some good ideas and wrote my speech with actual confidence. I practiced. I smiled. I made eye contact with

ANYONE CAN WRITE

Nearly 40 years in the business have taught me that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts. What we long for, though, is meaning and a connection at a deeper and more universal level. And that’s why The Observer will be running, from time to time, stories from students who are in my writing class, which I’ve been teaching for the past 10 years in Portland.

I take great satisfaction in helping so-called non-writers find and write stories from their lives and experiences. They walk into my room believing they don’t have what it takes to be a writer. I remind them if they follow their hearts, they will discover they are storytellers.

As we all are at our core. Some of these stories have nothing to do with La Grande or Union County. They do, however, have everything to do with life.

If you are interested in contacting me to tell me your story, I’d like to hear from you.

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Tom Hallman Jr. is a Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer for The Oregonian. He’s also a writing coach and has an affinity for Union County.

my imaginary audience.

On the big day, I put on my best pleated skirt and white sweater. I attempted to deal with my wild hair, kinked up from ill-considered pin curls. Oh well. I grabbed my speech and my attention-getting prop, and off I went.

As we arrived, the candidates gathered on stage. I looked around, and my jaw dropped.

My opponent was dressed in the most dazzling outfit I had ever seen. A tight sweater and skirt made entirely of pink angora. As she walked the little tufts of fluff floated and waved all around her.

The assembly began, and she was asked to go first. She stepped to the podium, and she said: “The purpose of these speeches is for you to hear us speak and see what we look like. So first ... I’ll show you what I look like.”

With that, she left the podium, went to center stage, held her arms out like a ballerina, and did a slow rotation. As she moved, her angora fluffs swayed in the spotlight. The boys went crazy. They stomped and cheered, creating additional breezes for her waving fuzz.

Finally, she returned to the podium and read the speech that no one would ever remember.

My turn. I pulled out my “attention getter,” a bunch of bananas, and said, “The Girls’ League is not just a bunch of girls clumped together like these bananas.” I smiled, and I felt a connection like I had never felt before. All my jitters disappeared, and I never had to look at my notes. I shared ideas with them, and I knew they were listening. Everyone was smiling, and I was on top of the world. I was also pretty sure of the outcome.

My opponent was gorgeous, and the boys loved her. But she had overlooked the first rule of public speaking. The audience rules.

Because, of course, for Girls’ League president? Only the girls voted.

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